

The Story of Mahmud of Ghazni and the Astrologer

Islamic Stories - Volume 69

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Chapter 1: A Test of Knowledge and Fate

Astrological Mastery: The Acumen of Abū Rayḥān

Among the luminaries of the medieval Islamic world, Abū Rayḥān stood as a towering figure in the realm of astrology and medicine. He was not merely a celebrated hakim (physician) but also a renowned munajjim (astrologer), whose knowledge of the stars granted him exceptional foresight. His statements, derived through meticulous observation and stellar calculation, often commanded the awe and conviction of those around him.

The Royal Challenge: Sultan Mahmud's Test

On one occasion, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni and the astrologer found themselves seated together within a chamber. Intending to test the authenticity of the astrologer's claims, the Sultan posed a challenge.

Sultan Mahmud:

"Tell me, after this sitting, through which door shall the king depart?"

With calm precision, Abū Rayḥān adjusted his astrolabe, consulted the celestial charts, and carried out the required computations. Upon determining the result, he recorded his prediction on a piece of paper and discreetly placed it near the Sultan's pillow.

Deception by Design: An Unseen Doorway

To confound the astrologer and test the veracity of his prediction, Sultan Mahmud issued a surprising command. He ordered that a new door be constructed by excavating the eastern wall of the palace chamber. His intention was clear: to exit through this newly formed passageway, thereby rendering the astrologer's task seemingly impossible.

The plan was carried out precisely as intended. Yet, when the written note was retrieved and read, it contained an exact prediction: the Sultan would exit through a door newly created in the eastern wall. The statement matched the outcome without deviation.

Another Trial: Predicting Retribution

Still unsatisfied, Sultan Mahmud pressed further. He turned once again to the astrologer.

Sultan Mahmud:

"Tell me now—what shall be my treatment of you?"

In response, Abū Rayḥān penned his answer on a piece of paper and handed it to a servant.

Immediately thereafter, the Sultan commanded a dramatic act.

Sultan Mahmud:

"Throw him from the rooftop."

His order was executed, and the astrologer was cast down. When the written answer was recovered and opened, it bore an exact prediction of this very event.